

St. Louis Roman Catholic Church
Northwest corner of Main and Edward Streets
Buffalo
Erie County
New York

HABS No. NY-5488

HABS
NY
15-BUF
7-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. NY-5488

ST. LOUIS ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

HABS
NY,
15-BUF,
7-

Location: Northwest corner of Main and Edward Streets,
Buffalo, Erie County, New York

Present Owner
and Occupant: St. Louis Roman Catholic Church

Present Use: Church

Statement of
Significance: This large, Gothic-styled church is located on the
site of the first Roman Catholic church in Buffalo.
Today this site faces one of the major north-south
streets leading from the center of the city. The
church thus services the business and inner-city
communities.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1889.
2. Architect: William Schickel and Ditmars, New York City.
3. Original and subsequent owners: In 1829, the land was
donated to the Roman Catholic community by Louis
LeCouteule as a result of persuasion by Father Badin.
4. Builder or contractor: Unknown.
5. Original plans: Unknown.
6. Alterations and additions: Due to erosion of masonry, the
turret was rebuilt in 1958. The open and pierced copper
fleche once located at the crossing has been removed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

After receipt of the property in 1829, the congregation under
the direction of Father Merty completed a log structure in
1832. A brick structure, considered at the time of its
completion in 1843, to be the largest church building in the
United States, was built under the direction of Father Pax.
A fire of March 25, 1885, in a nearby building spread to
the church, leveling the structure. Immediately after the
fire the congregation erected a temporary wooden structure
which was used until the present church was completed in
1889. The church was consecrated in 1913.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: A minimum of eight catalogued photographs are contained in the Iconographic Collections, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Clinton, Mrs. George, Jr. "Points on the Architecture of Buffalo Churches." Manuscript, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

- b. Secondary and published sources:

Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. Minimum of sixteen indexed references to newspaper articles.

Donohue, Rev. Thomas. History of the Catholic Church in Western New York: Diocese of Buffalo. Buffalo, 1904.

- c. Likely sources not yet investigated:

Diocese of Buffalo records.

St. Louis Church records.

Schickel and Ditmars office records.

Prepared by Staff, Buffalo and Erie
County Historical Society
November 9, 1964.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Gothic Revival style of this church reflects German and English antecedents of the mid-nineteenth century. The interior and exterior detailing is rather elaborate and fine for a parish church.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The Latin-cross plan contains seven bays in the nave and narthex, a center aisle terminating in a shallow apse, two side aisles, and north and south transept chapels.
2. Foundations: All foundations are stone.
3. Wall construction: The walls are of slightly dressed brown Medina sandstone ashlar masonry.
4. Structural system: The exterior masonry walls are load-bearing with pier buttresses defining the bay system.
5. Chimneys: There is one chimney.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways: The east facade contains a large, elevated recessed portal flanked by two similarly treated but smaller portals. The center portal tympanum contains a sculptured figure of St. Louis of France supported by a trumeau of engaged colonnettes. A bas-relief pattern of grape vines, clusters of grapes, and two shields serves as a background for the figure. Two rectangular toplights composed of five abstract floral stained-glass panels are located above the eight-panel exterior wooden doors. A second pair of doors covered with leather and studded in a decorative pattern is located immediately to the interior. The two double-door side-aisle entrances are each topped by a tympanum which is filled with a circular tracery pattern, backed by stained glass. The interior leather-covered doors are also studded in a decorative pattern. Each of the three pointed arched entrances is capped by a flat gable--the middle one containing a center quatrefoil design; the side ones, trefoil designs. Each of the three gables is topped by a finial and is flanked by piers. Each of the arched transept entrances is defined by an upper label molding. A tracery-filled tympanum is located above double-leaf wood-paneled doors, each leaf containing an arched window.
 - b. Windows: Each bay in the nave and transepts contains an arched stained-glass window in the clerestory level. Each bay in the side aisles contains similar windows. Large rose windows, each framed by an arched label molding, are located in the north and south walls of the transept. A deeply recessed

arched window topped by a label molding and an applied gable with finial is centered above the main east portal. The side entrances also have a pointed arched window centered above them. The turret to the left of the center portal has small lancet windows. The apse in the second level contains five stained-glass lancet windows by Zettler of Munich. Each bay has a basement window located in a well.

7. Roof: The steeply pitched slate-covered hipped roof is pierced by dormers in every bay. Each gabled dormer has a slate-covered spire which is topped by a small finial. Stone course eaves have attached copper gutters. The octagonal stair turret located at the southeast intersection of the tower and south side aisle terminates in a short spire topped by a finial. The five-tiered projecting center entrance tower rises to a pierced, open octagonal spire with crockets. The two levels containing the bell have lancet openings filled with louvers. A gold clock, donated by E. G. Spaulding in memory of a fireman who lost his life in the 1885 fire, is located below the octagonal portion of the tower. The large east window and the center portal composition complete the tower. All levels of the tower have pier buttresses topped by pinnacles.
8. Porches, stoops, and bulkheads: All entrances have projecting straight-run stairways with wrought hand-rails.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The structure is one story with clerestory. The three-aisle, six-bay nave terminates in an apse which extends to the east of the five-bay crossing. A choir gallery is located above the single bay of the narthex. A full basement is reached by interior and two exterior stairways.
2. Stairways: A stairway to the choir gallery is located in the turret.
3. Flooring: The wooden floors are covered with resilient tile.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls are painted plaster with gilt stencil decorations. A continuous vertical boarded natural finished wood wainscoting is topped by a running band of carved quatrefoils. The ceilings are all plaster with ribbed groin vaults springing from

fourteen polished granite columns which have varied foliate marble capitals. Clustered responds extend from the columns through the clerestory to the vaults. The side-aisle ribs terminate in clustered responds finished with decorative corbeling below which are centered framed bas-relief stations of the cross.

5. Doorways and doors: All molding and paneled doors are of wood.
6. Special decorative features: The main altar is made of Carrara marble. The transept altars and communion rail are also of marble. An elaborately carved wooden and stone pulpit with a pitched hexagonal cantilevered sounding board is located at the southwest corner of the crossing. All pews are wooden with Gothic Revival detailing in the ends.
7. Hardware: None of note.
8. Lighting: Each main vault contains a cluster of incandescent lights. Wall sconces also use the bare bulbs.
9. Heating: The central heating system has pipes located under the pews but above the floor.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The church is sited on a large level lot facing east, across a wide sidewalk and entrance approach toward a busy north-south thoroughfare. A parking lot is located on the northwest corner of the property. The surrounding, rather run-down commercial section is in sharp contrast to the manicured appearance of St. Louis Church.
2. Historic landscape design: The large expanse of grass to the north and south appears in old photographs. Decorative cast-iron fence posts and wrought-iron pickets and rails completely encircle the property.
3. Outbuildings: A rectory is located to the west of the church.

Prepared by Susan R. Slade
September 1973

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This photo-data book was prepared as part of a 1964-65 recording project in cooperation with the Buffalo-Western New York Chapter of AIA, Olaf William Shelgren (at that time Chairman of the Chapter's Preservation Committee), and Olaf William Shelgren, Jr.--both, of the firm Shelgren, Patterson and Marzec. Photographs were taken in May, 1965, by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer. Under the direction of John C. Poppeliers, Chief, HABS, a further research and editorial project was undertaken by Susan R. Slade, architectural historian, in September, 1973.